

August 10, 1950

NOTES ON CLARK'S ISLAND
by Fisher Ames

If there had been no Ice Age there would be no Clark's Island. A moraine deposit from a glacier, it is a story land of sand, but there is fertile soil in its rock-studded 55 acres. It has always been an early historical spot, which it equaled, is scarcely surpassed in the country, and Hutchinson called it "one of the best islands in Massachusetts Bay."

Red cedars spread thickly over a part of it in early days when Indians went there to cut their slender cedar lodge poles and to hold clam mussel feasts on the north end, mixing roasting ears of corn with the tasty blivins. I have found several of these old picnic sites marked by circular stumps "clam rounds" of burnt and broken shell, the topmost layers still showing some recognizable shapes, although the deep-down bottom ones are now little more than black powder. Many generations must have enjoyed its cool summer breezes, but when Thomas Clark's foot touched it on that stormy December day the Indian's title to the island vanished like mist before the wind.

The Pilgrims held the island as common property for a time. They made salt there and allowed the poor to cut some of its cedars and pasture cattle where there was grass. Sheep were also pastured there. This was so treasured by the Pilgrims that on July 1, 1632, it was officially ordered that "no sheep be sold out of the colony under penalty of forfeiting their due value."

First Political Grafter?
Nathaniel Clark thought he had a fair right to the island since it had been discovered and named for his father. He counted also on his political pull, for he was a friend of Sir Edmund Andros, Governor of the Colony, and a member of his Council. When Clark applied for a grant of the island in 1687 Andros approved, for he had no great love for the Pilgrims. He attached little weight to any of the existing land titles that

stood in his way, and dodged from Indians he declared "no better than the scratch of a bear's claws." He was one of our first political grafters. Plymouth stiffly refused to recognize the validity of the transfer, whereupon Clark caused the arrest of the Plymouth committee, with old Elden Faunce, the town clerk, binding them over to appear at the Court in Boston.

The controversy was never legally settled. Before it could come before the Court, Governor Andros was up to his ears in trouble. The public resentment aroused by his despotic methods could no longer be ignored, and the people, rising against him, seized him as a political prisoner and shipped him to England for trial. They arrested Nathaniel Clark, too, and sent him off on the same vessel.

What happened to Andros is another story. Clark was acquitted and returned a free man, but Plymouth stuck to its original decision and summarily dismissed his claim to the island. The matter was finally and permanently settled in 1690, when the town sold the island to Kikunah Watson and two other applicants. The latter soon sold their share to Watson, and thenceforth, for more than 200 years, the Watson clan were the sole owners of the little island principally.

Clark Knows Better
The family owned much property other than the island. They were well-off, for those days and lived more or less like the British squires they admired. They had several houses besides the one on the island, which they visited only occasionally, and as successful and prominent citizens they had their portraits done by Copley. One that can certainly be called unique, pictures Kikunah Watson being attacked by a shark, apparently in Boston Harbor. I think it still hangs in the Copley room of the Boston Art Museum. Kikunah, by the way, emerged from the encounter minus a leg.

Like many of the wealthy colonials, loving their money and their King from whom, they thought, all blessings flowed, most of the Watsons

were fanatical Tories. The Revolution brought an end to their prosperous career; their lands were confiscated and they had to flee to England. There he was knighted by King George who, after the formal stroke of the sword, ordered Sir Kikunah to arise, emphasizing the first syllable of his subject's Christian name. Kikunah had always accepted the second syllable, but from then on he loyally adopted the King's choice.

John Watson, who had aided with the Colonials, became the head of the house, and with other family members he withdrew to Clark's Island — one possession that had not been confiscated. He was succeeded by his son Edmund, Uncle Edmund, as he was called, never married. He was the patriarchal leader of the clan in a literal sense — "Lord of the Isle," as his friend Daniel Webster called him. His word was virtually law, but he was a mild and generous ruler, that of his own pocket he supported impeccable relative for many years.

For 40 years Uncle Edmund left the island only for a brief winter visit to the mainland. He was a great reader, particularly of poetry, and wrote a bit of verse himself now and then. He admired the work of Geoffrey Chaucer, that forgotten British poet, and in appreciation, sent him a barrel of his choicest hand-picked apples. Mr. Chaucer answered with a personally inscribed volume of his poems. Not to be outdone, Uncle Edmund came right back at him with a volume of his own.

From writing poetry to butchering and dressing his own beef and mutton, handling a boat with matchless skill, developing the horticulture of the island till it became famous for its flowers and experiments with egg-trees, tobacco and other exotic plants, there was little that Uncle Edmund could not turn his mind and hand to. He had a powerful, finely proportioned body and a handsome face. He loved literature, the sea and all that was beautiful. He was a kind of Homeric character, striding tanned and barefooted about the little freehold over which he presided.

Protected Birds

He loved birds, and would not allow a gun to be fired on the island.

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He also opposed visits from strangers. One day at low tide he saw a man start to wade from Squish Island to the island. On the last stretch a narrow but deep channel posed a seemingly impassable barrier, but an opportunely passing fisherman picked up the stranger and ferried him to the island.

Uncle Edmund, who had been watching all this with growing indignation, called to the man: "Who the devil are you, sir?"

"My name," said the stranger meekly, "is Henry Thoreau."

If there was one American author whom Uncle Edmund admired above all others, it was Thoreau! The eminent naturalist-philosopher from Concord was given a welcome that included the "key" to the island, an honor given to only a favored few. Among other notables who frequently visited, were Daniel Webster, Louisa May Alcott, Frank Sanborn (the Concord sage), George Bradford (son of the Brook Farm founder), Adelaide Phillips (the singer), and Captain Almy, the shipmaster and art connoisseur who had an intimate knowledge of every European painting gallery.

Aunt Harriet, Edmund's half-sister, was at one time said to be engaged to a suitor from Plymouth. The course of their love seemed to be running smoothly enough until the day the gentleman called across the bay and landed at the island's stone wharf. As he stepped ashore he saw Aunt Harriet running to meet him, her long hair streaming in the wind. With one arm extended, she cried out: "Take back your picture!" She handed it to him as she spoke.

Without another word she turned and ran back to the house. Her suitor withdrew. No cause of the break was ever revealed, but it was final. Perhaps like island dwellers in general, Aunt Harriet had become intolerant of any intrusion from the world outside.

Note: Mr. Ames' article on Clark's Island will be concluded in next week's issue of the Clipper.

KINGSTON MAN INJURED
IN COLLISION

Robert M. Gibbs of Grove Street, Kingston, suffered minor injuries last Sunday night when his car hit the fence at "Bradley's Curve" (near the Hannard house) on Route 3-A. He was treated by Dr. Starr. During the past 14 years four persons have been killed in this spot, which is sometimes called "Death Corner."

TIMES HAVE CHANGED

Some of Duxbury's Highway and Police Regulations were quaint in 1906. Here are two:

"Three or more persons shall not stand in a group or near each other on any sidewalk in such a manner as to obstruct or impede a free passage for foot passengers."

"No automobile or other vehicle shall be propelled through any street of the Town at a greater speed than ten miles per hour, this to apply to all streets East of and including the State road, and West of such roads not more than 15 miles per hour."

PIRGIM CHURCH

Mrs. John Alden and Mrs. Willard Mills sang the dust at the Communion Service at PIRGIM Church on Sunday, August 6.

The Rev. and Mrs. Carl Hill and family will leave this week for a month's vacation at Modomak, Maine. The Rev. Mr. Glen Trimble will conduct the service next Sunday. Mr. Trimble is Assistant Director for the Planning and Research Department of the Massachusetts Council of Churches. The Rev. Mr. Abbot Peterson will conduct the service on August 27.

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August 27, 1950

NOTES ON CLARK'S ISLAND

By Helen Ames

PART II

The Watsons found their little island free from snakes. More important, rats and other vermin were absent. There were no toads either. Mrs. Emily Watson, who shared the family passion for flowers, imported some to keep down insect pests in the garden.

The great immigrants multiplied beyond all expectations. Finally they became a veritable plague. The saying of the women sliced them up by hundreds in the fields which, as one Watson stated, were "juicy" with them. They made walking anywhere on the island unpleasant. They invaded the houses and dove headlong into the island wall from which they were fished out with nets.

By some occult process of nature, snakes began to appear. From a snake's point of view a toad is a delicious and highly nutritious morsel. The new arrivals fell to work with gusto and in time the toad became a rarity. Contemporaneously the snakes gradually diminished in numbers till very few were left. So runs the story.

The old well from which generations of the islanders drew their water lies in a stone-walled, forest-shaded corner of Well Field between Old House and Tether House, as they were called. Once a careless cow broke through the wooden well cover. The job of hoisting her up from the

bottom was a tough one and while they were about it the rescuers thought it a fitting time to give the well a thorough cleaning. One reason was there had been frequent complaints that the water did not taste quite as sweet as formerly.

Objects Salvaged

An interesting variety of objects was dredged from the old well: several hammers, trowels, spades and other tools; some kitchen utensils, including a coffee pot or so, two or three ancient hoop-skirts, a barrelful of toads, and six pairs of Mr. Henry Warden's spectacles.

Mr. Warden, a relative of the Watsons, seemed to have been one of those rather irritating persons who make a habit of mislaying their eyeglasses. Just how or why he should have "mislaid" them in the well remained an unexplained mystery.

The little island had another mystery on its records, one much stranger and more romantic. The story of Mary Willoughby begins in old Halem in the days when sailing ships ruled the seas and the town was still a port of consequence.

Captain Willoughby, engaged in trade with the Orient, could pay only brief visits to his wife and Mary, who very naturally was presumed to be his daughter. Unlike the rest of the community, the little family was an unknown quantity. Little was known concerning their history and Mrs. Willoughby seemed to want it that way. She was distant with her neighbors and refused to let Mary

minge with the other children except at school.

On one of Captain Willoughby's homeward voyages yellow fever broke out among his crew. The ships cargo was destined for Boston, but on the way up the bay the Captain stopped at Salem, taking his sick crew ashore with him. He had it placed in a nearby field with the intention of submitting it to the purifying effects of a temporary burial, but he failed for Boston before his order was carried out. He had however cautioned his wife to keep away from the chest.

A Fatal Mistake

Like Pandora, Mrs. Willoughby could not resist the urge to investigate the forbidden box. She went secretly to the field and opened it. Whether the lifting of the lid freed some hungry germ-bearing mosquitoes or not, it is known that soon afterwards the poor woman contracted yellow fever and died of it.

Return sailing on his next voyage Captain Willoughby placed little Mary with one of the neighbors. From time to time more or less irregularly, he sent money for her support. Suddenly the remittance ceased to come and so did any news of the Captain.

There were rumors that his ship had foundered with all hands during a storm; that he had been captured by a French privateer and died in a French prison. Whatever the cause of his disappearance no authentic report of it ever reached Salem.

The little orphan was sent to the Brookline Poor Farm. Being a pretty attractive child she was soon taken into the home of an elderly couple who decided their intention of adopting her. Before they carried out their promise the fate that seemed to pursue Mary struck again. Death came suddenly to the two old people, left again without a protector, Mary had to return to the Poor Farm.

About this time a request came to the Farm from Madam Watson of Clark's Island. Did they have a young girl they could recommend as a companion helper? The matron thought she had, and sent Mary on trial.

The Watsons liked Mary at once and liking soon grew to something stronger. Mary gradually ceased to be a servant and became an accepted member of the family. She had found a home at last.

Now the "mystery" concerning

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Mary Willoughby began. A friend visiting the Watsons was much struck by the girl's looks and air of breeding. She asked a number of questions with the result that the suspicion beginning to be born in her mind was greatly strengthened. It was based on an advertisement she had seen some time before in a certain newspaper.

A copy of the paper was sent for and there, in the "agony column," was a notice by a Lady Mary Willoughby of England requesting information concerning her missing granddaughter whom she had reason to believe was in America.

Putting everything together; the scanty knowledge concerning Mary's family, the similarity of names, the reference to America in the notice, and last but not least the girl's notably English look, all seemed to point to the possibility that Mary might be the missing granddaughter.

Mary herself laughed at the idea. The Watsons shared her skepticism. At any rate nothing was done about it in spite of the visitor's insistence. And there the matter rested for a number of years.

It was a lawyer who picked up the threads again. He happened to hear the story and his legal mind saw possibilities in it well worth his attention. Mary was reluctant to have anything to do with the case. She had no faith in a successful outcome, but finally the lawyer persuaded her to become his client.

Unsalvaged Mystery

Her judgment proved sounder than his. On communicating with the English Willoughbys they learned that Lady Mary Willoughby was dead. Nothing had come of her advertisement and the search for the lost granddaughter had long been given up. Lady Mary seemed to have been the only one interested in the matter. Her surviving relations knew and cared nothing about the case. Quite possibly some of them would not have welcomed a poor relative who might have a claim on Lady Mary's property.

With no cooperation from England the lawyer was eventually forced to stop proceedings. He was defeated if

not convinced. He was probably more concerned over his failure than Mary who was really quite satisfied with her life as it was. She lived to be a very old lady, keeping her beauty and charm to the end. The mystery that shrouded her antecedents, like the minor one of Mr. Warden's spectacles, was never solved.

"ARSENIC AND OLD LACE"
COMING SOON

Nine years ago to the week, Broadway producers, Lindsay and Crouse, presented a play that all parties felt would either be one of the biggest flops or hits of its day. It overwhelmingly proved to be a hit. "Arsenic and Old Lace" tumbled the N.Y. critics and the play had a successful run on Broadway, in London, on the road, and has played in every part and language of the globe.

Starting Tuesday, August 22, the Duxbury Playhouse will present "Arsenic and Old Lace" with Virginia Donaldson and Ruth Coffin, portraying the elderly sisters, with a passion for elderberry wine and relieving old lonely men of their misery. In the part of Jonathan Brewster, which has been played by Boris Karloff, Erich von Stroheim, John Carradine and a score of other movie horror men, Douglas Leonard departs from his usual type of role.

The Tuesday night opening will be a benefit for the Couples' Club of the First Parish Unitarian Church of Kingston, Mass.

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